



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

May 17, 2015

Honorable Charles W. Wiger
Minnesota Senate
State Capitol, Room 205
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55155

Honorable Jenifer Loon
Minnesota House of Representatives
449 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Wiger and Representative Loon:

I am writing because of the extraordinary potential that high-quality preschool has to set children on a path to success in school and in life. Extending that opportunity offers the potential to transform the lives of countless young children, in Minnesota and throughout the nation, for decades to come.

Last month, Governor Dayton and I visited a preschool classroom in North Saint Paul. I'd like to reiterate some points that I made during that visit, because the opportunity of preschool is so important for the future of our children.

In education, we often see incremental change; but occasionally, there is an opportunity for transformational change. I can't overstate the importance of what the Governor and the Commissioner are proposing.

As I travel the nation, an enormous number of states, including Minnesota, have massive waiting lists of families looking to get their children off to a good start. The vast majority of children from disadvantaged communities who start kindergarten without those opportunities begin their studies one year to fourteen months behind. When that happens, nobody wins.

In just the last few years, Minnesota has made important strides to improve access to high-quality early learning – progress that was achieved with bipartisan cooperation. But despite your state's initial investments in early childhood education over these last several years, Minnesota still ranks low for access to preschool. Your state is improving faster than most others – and you should take real pride in that. But Minnesota still faces devastating achievement gaps, and to change that, we need to take on opportunity gaps. While achievement gaps are beginning to close in Minnesota, they are not closing anywhere near fast enough. If you are serious about closing the achievement gap in Minnesota, there is no better way to do it than to provide every single child across the state with access to high-quality pre-kindergarten.

Incremental change can help. But once in a while you have the chance to go from the bottom nationally to the very top. In those moments, policymakers have the rare opportunity to truly make lasting and transformational change in the lives of children.

If I had one extra tax dollar, I would put it behind early childhood education. With a significant state budget surplus, you have the rare and enviable opportunity to change the opportunity structure for children, for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arne Duncan", written in a cursive style.

Arne Duncan